



# Living Paper

Curated by Olivia Wang

galerie du monde

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10 Jan - 9 Mar 2024, Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong

Participating Artists —

Chiang Yomei / Fu Xiaotong / Hung Fai / Young-sé Lee / Ling Pui Sze / Ma Hui / Wai Pong-yu / Kelly Wang / Wu Chi-Tsung / Zheng Chongbin

About the Curator —



Olivia Wang is an independent curator and writer based in Hong Kong. She is the Director and Producer of “Unsung Heroes of Ink” (2020), a short documentary on the role of paper in ink painting. She is the representative of the Ink Society and is also on the panel of judges for the UOB Art in Ink Award. Olivia holds a BA from Brown University and MPhil from Oxford University.

# Living Paper

Curatorial Essay by Olivia Wang

*Living Paper* is a group exhibition showcasing ten artists who explore the material properties of paper. Coming from different generations and geographies, each of these artists presents works that challenge the traditional use of the material. On display is a wide array of techniques to mine its special physical qualities, by means of tearing, layering, and sculpting through to soaking, puncturing and dissipating.

Paper is a material deeply imbued with Chinese tradition. Handmade *xuan* paper has been produced in Anhui province using labour-intensive methods since the Tang dynasty. It continues to be cherished today by ink painters and calligraphers for its high quality and historical significance. For the featured artists, embracing paper allows them to connect with their identity and heritage which they fuse with contemporary concepts to create new forms of expression.

Amsterdam-based artist Ma Hui blends ink with steeped pu'er tea to paint visually powerful works. Her fluid ink and brush techniques lay bare the range of natural reactions between ink, water and *xuan* paper. Although the artist has lived in the Netherlands since 1987, she looks back to her early years in China, particularly the years spent in a re-education village in the countryside of Ningxia Province. Her memories of the yellow clay of the riverbanks of the Yellow River, the dark swirling waters, the songs of fishermen, and the long ropes from their boats floating on the currents, provide a rich source of inspiration in her practice.

London-based artist Chiang Yomei, by contrast, creates dreamlike scenes by applying water to western watercolour paper, before painting with ink and then sprinkling the surface with salt. Allowing the ink, salt and water to interact spontaneously, the artist invites the element of chance to guide the creation of the artwork. The exhibited paintings were conceived of after Chiang reread the poems of Tang dynasty monk-poet Han Shan in the early days of the pandemic. Through Han Shan's poems, Chiang found herself transported from lockdown at her London home to an imaginary, timeless landscape. "From Fish Mountain Studio [Chiang's studio] I embarked upon a contemplative and sometimes playful journey in dialogue with Han Shan, and translated this from mind to hand into brush and ink," the artist writes.

Taipei-based artist Wu Chi-Tsung uses an innovative technique drawn from the early cyanotype process to create collaged images that evoke the majestic mountains in traditional Chinese paintings. He treats *xuan* paper with photosensitive coating, crumples the sheets by hand, thus forming wrinkles and folds, and then exposes them to sunlight. From the resulting dozens of textured papers of different tonalities, he assembles and layers the fragments to build landscapes that resemble rocky terrain with peaks shrouded in mist, snow, and rushing water. For the artist, it's all about experimentation. "Most artists have a strong ego. We try to control our work. But the more you try to control it, the more likely you lose the possibility. Sometimes, we should just let it go. Let the work grow in the way it should," Wu has said.

Another artist who deploys paper collage is the Hong Kong-based artist Ling Pui Sze. *White Mirror 2* is composed of microscopic images of the artist's own cells, and X-rays and CT reports of her own body. Through her signature process of first ink-jet printing these images on extremely thin *washi* paper, spraying them with water and tearing them by hand into small pieces, she then crafted the collaged image in the form of two galaxies merging together. The work reveals her self-reflection. "Seeing how a tiny cell of mine can be magnified into such intricate details under a microscope, I feel like my existence is akin to a minuscule particle in the universe," she observes.

Breaking the mould of two-dimensional painting, Ling's *Solaris* is a sculptural installation made specifically for the exhibition. Inspired by the 1972 sci-fi film of the same name, *Solaris* explores the power of memories and experiences. Constructed with bamboo and plastic strips, *xuan* paper and hollow cone-shape structures, the installation evokes the barnacles that attach to animals such as whales. Although not parasitic, they reproduce on their own and become part of the host animal's body. "Just like memories, the barnacles can be long-lasting in our minds and difficult to let go if we keep thinking about them," she writes.

The New York-based Chinese-American artist Kelly Wang also challenges the conventional use of paper to create sculpture composed of twisted strips of newspaper. Inspired by the artist's interest in Chinese art and history, *Brush Rest 2* takes the form of a five-peak mountain, traditionally a popular shape of brush rest used on the scholar's desk. Wang plays with scale and proportion, enlarging a miniature object that originally represented the monumentality of a landscape. Using newspaper, she has reimagined the classical object in a novel and unorthodox way.

For Wang, the use of newspaper holds deep personal meaning. Her *Microcosm* series began during the early days of the pandemic when the artist's late father was hospitalised for Covid-19. In the months following his death, Wang twisted the newspapers that she had saved for her father into strands, creating images of scholar's rocks. "In my hands, the words on the paper collapsed into a feeling, the strings became lifelines connecting the present to memories, the living to the dead, light to dark matter, and the individual to the collective through a multidimensional labyrinth of space-time," she writes. The series has since evolved. Having used up her father's original newspapers, the artist has collected newspapers from her mother and her neighbours, bringing together a community of people who knew and loved her father in the creation of her new works. Wang has also taken her experiments further. In *Microcosm 16* and *17*, she has added new textures and highlighted particular colours, as well as incorporated *xuan* and cloud dragon paper with the newspaper, enhancing their sculptural quality.

Hong Kong-based artist Wai Pong-yu uses newspaper in an equally personal but very different way. In *A Rhythm of Landscape 55*, Wai selected pages from the once popular tabloid in Hong Kong, *Apple Daily*, which he sanded down, allowing the colours to fade, and tears and holes to appear. Then, using a ruler, he drew lines with coloured inks across the surface, the sharp and fast strokes of the pen further eroding the paper. "The stories that once were part of the city's intellectual terrain have now gone", he writes. The work lies on a sheet of mesh, engendering an uneven surface. It is set on a low pedestal which is lit from below, inviting visitors to view the piece as a relic and symbol of the past.

*A Rhythm of Landscape 54* also conveys Wai's reflections on the city. Using a technical pen loaded with blue ink, he drew fluid, curved lines across a saturated sheet of paper, allowing the ink to diffuse and the pen's nib to tear the surface. Although the particular brand of blue ink is no longer produced, Wai was able to find the last two remaining bottles of ink at a ship supplies company. "It feels like a journey back to the origin of Hong Kong in history," he says. The sharpness of the pen's nib—which the artist likens to "a healing needle for resilience" or "a torturing nail"—has punctured the body of the paper, but it remains remarkably strong.

In her two works, Beijing-based artist Fu Xiaotong reveals the beauty and tactility of handmade *xuan* paper through painstaking needlework. She uses an awl to pierce thousands of tiny holes into very thick *xuan* paper to sculpt her compositions. By piercing the paper in multiple directions, she raises and depresses the surface of the paper in varying levels. For her, traditional brush and ink conceal the beauty of the paper, so it is her intention to reveal it without interference.

The importance of process is emphasised in the titles of her works which are named after the number of pinpricks required to form them. *135,136 Pinpricks* depicts a mountainous landscape, with its three peaks and topology extraordinarily defined by the effects of light and subtle shadows of the holes in the paper. The sculptural *181,005 Pinpricks* takes the form of a human torso. Undulating across it are abstract breast-like forms that protrude towards the viewer. The artist's use of the motif references the maternal and also the primeval cycle of life.

While Fu Xiaotong's art is created from the absences in the paper, Korean-French artist Young-sé Lee, by contrast, adds relief to the surface of the paper through his intricate embossing method. This involves first roughly carving abstract motifs on thick wooden panels, and then applying a single strip of *hanji* paper soaked in water, ink and mineral pigments on top. Using a flat brush to tap across the surface, Lee presses the paper into the wood. The paper gradually takes on the reliefs of the carving and the natural grains of the wood. After repeating this process over and over, he arranges the strips together. In the final step, he applies touches of colour to enrich the textures of the paper's surface. The resulting abstractions evoke elements from the natural world, from shimmering reflections of light on water to the organic patterns found on rocks, earth and tree bark.

With an intimate understanding of the interactions between ink, water and paper, Hong Kong-based artist Hung Fai deconstructs the elements of Chinese ink painting. A deeply personal work, *Traces VII* records traces and memories. Its elaborate process began with first saturating a sheet of *xuan* paper (left panel of the diptych) with water, on top of which Hung used an ink pen to draw free-hand dots which diffused and flowed in the rivulets of water. He then laid a blank, dry sheet of paper on top, gently tapping the surface to allow the ink to further bleed and pool. On top of these two sheets, he used an inkless pen and a heavy metal ruler to draw lines horizontally and vertically across. While devoid of any ink, the tracks left by the pen have created palpable marks and traces in the papers, alluding to the power of absence. "Through these incisions, what had been concealed was retrieved, and then interwoven, transformed and overlapped with the myriad of new marks," he writes. Finally, he separated the two sheets, placing them side by side.

Paper provides a fertile ground for experimentation. In a departure from his distinctive ink painting, multimedia installation and video practice, San Francisco-based artist Zheng Chongbin used the monotype printmaking technique to create these exhibited works. The process involves applying oil-based black and coloured inks on an acrylic surface, and enhancing certain areas with the use of tape, Q-tips, steel wool and organic solvents. Then, before the inks have had a chance to dry, the surface is run through a press, transferring the image to a sheet of paper. The technique requires precision but also allows for a great deal of spontaneity. The resulting compositions are multi-layered abstractions with rich gradations of colour. Zheng's fecund imagination pushes the possibilities and limits of the materials. *Displaced Squares* forms a dynamic, prismatic image with shifting geometries. By contrast, *Dawn* takes on an almost reflective surface, with striking gradations of grey, blue and orange.

While the material enables artists to engage with their artistic traditions, the multivalence of the material itself lends itself to endless possibilities of exploration and creation. In the hands of this group of artists, paper becomes alive and comes into its own being.

# Chiang Yomei

b. 1961, Taipei / based in London



Chiang Yomei studied art and literature at Skidmore College in upstate New York, after a traditional Chinese education in Taiwan. From an early age, she studied Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy with masters of both genres. In 1981, after a year of studying in Germany, she moved to the United Kingdom and received a BA in the History and Theory of Art and English literature from the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1984. After Kent, Chiang graduated from the Sotheby's Works of Art Course and went on to study Chinese painting and ceramics at SOAS, University of London. After practising fine art in a more concentrated capacity, she received a BFA from Winchester School of Art in 1994. Chiang's work can be found in public and private collections in Europe and Asia.

Born to a Chinese-Russian father and Chinese-German mother, Chiang's aesthetic sensibility has been shaped by her intercultural background and influenced both by Chinese and Western artistic practices. Underpinning her multidisciplinary practice as an artist and poet is Buddhism. A devoted practitioner, her oeuvre explores notions of time, impermanence, and the ever-changing nature of all things. Chiang lives and works in London.



Chiang Yomei  
Cold Mountain (8), 2021  
Chinese Ink, Salt, Glue and Pencil on Paper  
70 x 50 cm



Chiang Yomei

Cold Mountain Revisited (8), 2022 / Chinese Ink, Salt, Gold Powder, Lemon Juice, Gouache and Pencil on Paper, Collage, 70 x 50 cm (left)

Cold Mountain Revisited (1), 2023 / Chinese Ink, Salt, Glue and Pencil on Paper, 70 x 50 cm (right)



《身前身後》

蔣友梅

酣夢中的石頭  
把自己夢到一個不知名的地方

不再是石頭的它  
在有形和無形間

遨遊  
頻頻轉生  
輕若流雲

“The Dreaming Stone”

Chiang Yomei

The stone dreams itself  
Into a space unknown  
Light as a passing cloud

Dreaming and dreaming  
Until it is a stone no more

The stone is a thought  
Reinventing itself between worlds



Chiang Yomei

Story of the Stone (2), 2023 / Chinese Ink, Salt, Glue and Pencil on Paper, 70 x 50 cm (left)

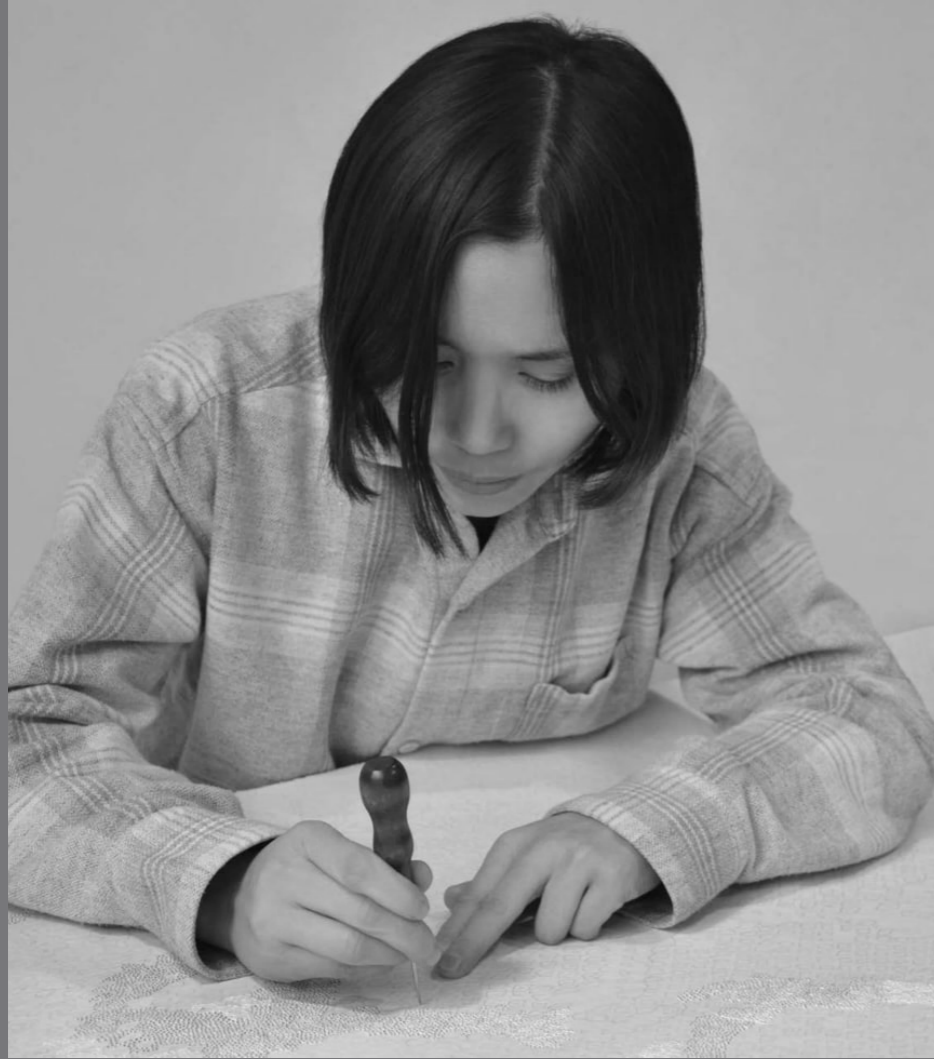
Story of the Stone (5), 2023 / Chinese Ink, Salt, Glue and Pencil on Paper, 70 x 50 cm (right)



Chiang Yomei  
Mykonos (1), 2021  
Chinese Ink, Salt, Watercolor and Pencil on Paper  
76 x 56 cm

# Fu Xiaotong

b. 1976, Shanxi / based in Beijing and Berlin

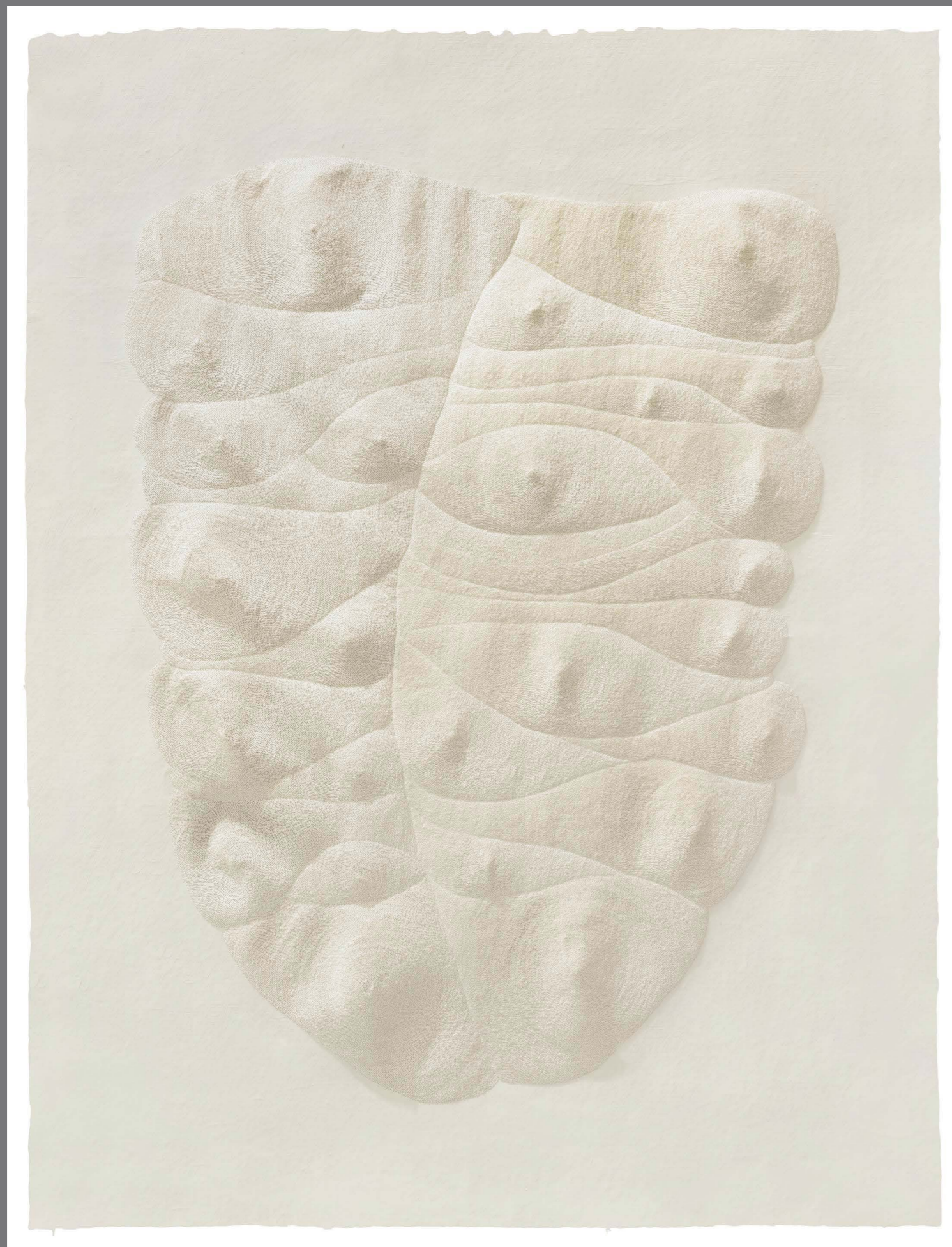


Fu Xiaotong received her BA in oil painting from Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 2000 and MA from the Experimental Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2013. Fu developed a deep interest in *xuan* paper when pursuing her MA and has since forged her unique “language of the needle”. She forms her compositions by using an awl to pierce thousands of tiny holes in multiple directions into *xuan* paper.

Fu has participated in solo and group exhibitions in mainland China and the United States. She was the winner of the inaugural Vogue Hong Kong Women’s Art Prize in 2019. Her work is in the collections of the Herbert F. Johnson Art Museum at Cornell University, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, among others.



Fu Xiaotong  
135,136 Pinpricks, 2023  
Handmade *Xuan* Paper, 80 x 100 x 3 cm



Fu Xiaotong  
181,005 Pinpricks, 2020  
Handmade *Xuan* Paper  
138 x 107 x 3 cm

# Hung Fai

b. 1988, Hong Kong / based in Hong Kong



Hung Fai is the son of noted ink painter Hung Hoi (b. 1957) but was determined from a young age to forge an artistic language independent from his father's. Since earning his BFA from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2013, he has developed his own visual idiom whereby he radically challenges the aesthetics of traditional Chinese painting. Using an ink pen instead of a brush, he deconstructs the techniques and elements in Chinese painting—paper, water and ink—and then conceptually reconstructs and transforms them, expanding the possibilities of the genre.

Hung earned his BFA from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2013. Recent group exhibitions include the Kathmandu Triennale 2077 (2022), Macao Museum of Art (2022), Para Site, Hong Kong (2020), Guangdong Museum of Art (2020), and M+ (2017). Hung's work is in the collections of M+ and the Hong Kong Museum of Art. He received the Gold Prize for the Liu Kuo-sung Ink Art Award Hong Kong edition in 2022. Hung lives and works in Hong Kong.



Hung Fai, Traces VII, 2023  
Ink on Paper, Diptych, 180 x 96.8 cm each



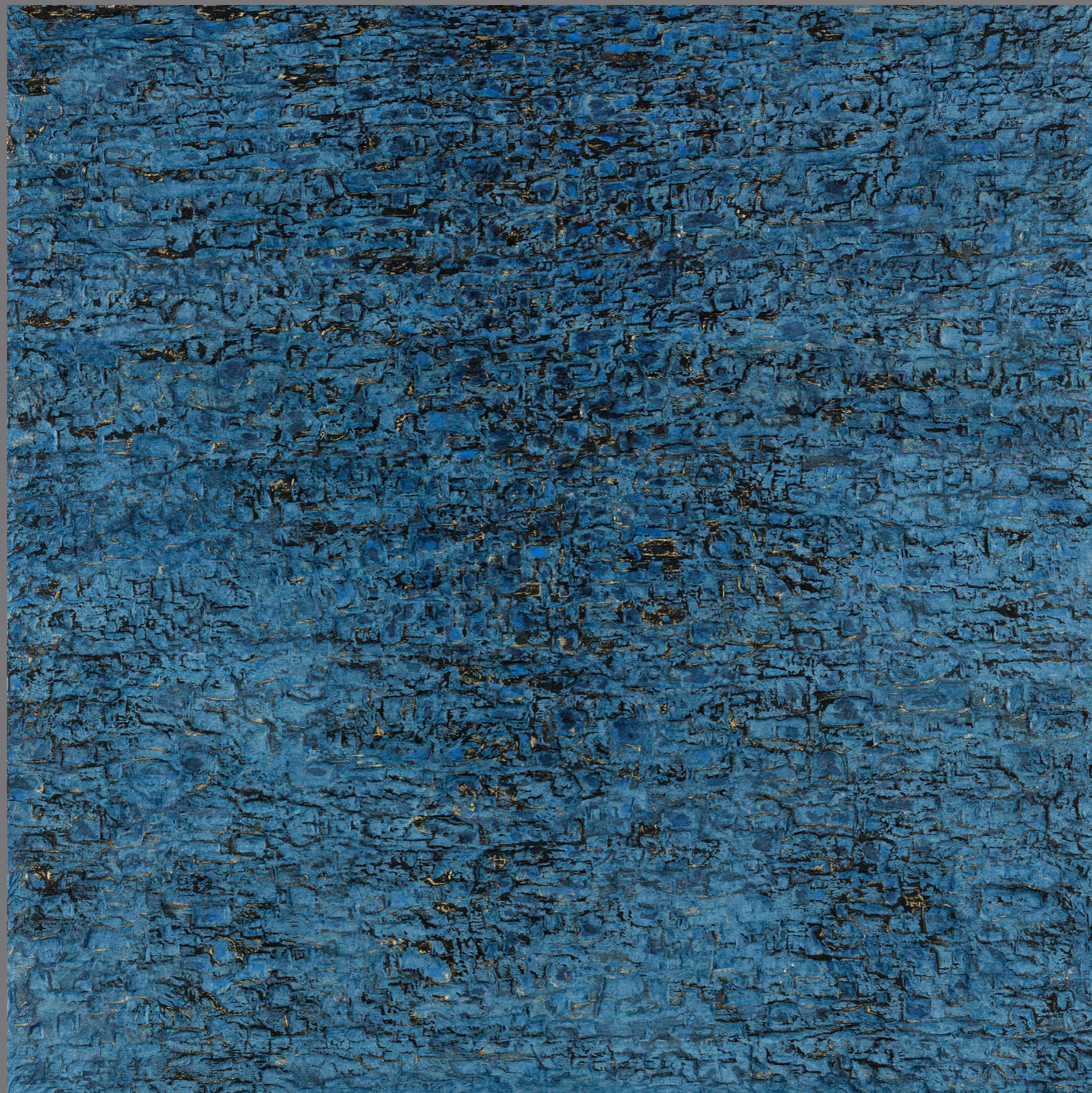
# Young-sé Lee

b. 1956, Seoul / based in France



Young-sé Lee moved to Paris with his parents at the age of 2. At a young age, he gained a foundation in ink painting from his father and ink painter Ungno Lee (1904–1989). He studied art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière followed by the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Although trained in Western painting and copperplate engraving, he later abandoned them in favour of traditional East Asian materials: ink, acrylic, and mineral pigments on *hanji* (Korean handmade paper).

Lee has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in France and South Korea, and his work is in the collections of the Cernuschi Museum, Paris, Lee Ungno Museum, Daejeon, among others. This is the first time his works are exhibited in Hong Kong. Lee lives and works in Vaux-sur-Seine, France.



Young-sé Lee, *Aube Sereine*, 2021

Ink, Acrylic, Vegetal and Mineral Colours on *Hanji* Paper, 95 x 95 cm



Young-sé Lee, Reflets d'hiver, 2022

Ink, Acrylic, Vegetal and Mineral Colours on *Hanji* Paper, 135 x 135 cm

# Ling Pui Sze

b. 1989, Guangzhou / based in Hong Kong



Ling Pui Sze earned her BFA from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she received the Wucius Wong Creative Ink Painting Award at graduation in 2012. Inspired by the natural world and science, Ling's experimental ink-and-collage paintings are composed of images obtained from various means, such as microscopes, satellites, and even X-rays of her own body. Exploring the relationship between biological traits and the intricacies of the human experience, Ling's practice extends to sculpture, video and installation.

Ling's work is in the collections of M+ and Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum. She received an Honourable Mention for the Liu Kuo-sung Ink Art Award in 2023. She was an artist-in-residence at Robinson College, Cambridge University in 2023; she has also participated in residency programmes in Taiwan and Iceland. Ling lives and works in Hong Kong.



Ling Pui Sze

White Mirror 2, 2023

Mixed Media on Paper, 57 x 133 cm

# Ma Hui

b. 1958, Hebei / based in Amsterdam



Ma Hui graduated from the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in 1982. In 1987, she moved to the Netherlands where she further pursued her studies in art at Hogeschool, Utrecht. Inspired by her early years spent in China, Ma creates ink-on-paper abstractions, blending black ink with pu'er tea to create spontaneous and fluid effects.

Ma's work can be found in public and private collections in Europe and mainland China. She lives and works in Amsterdam.



Ma Hui  
The River, 2021-2022  
Pu'er and Ink on *Xuan* Paper  
35 x 135 cm



Ma Hui  
Autumn Woods, 2022  
Pu'er and Ink on *Xuan* Paper  
35 x 135 cm



# Wai Pong-yu

b. 1982, Henan / based in Hong Kong



Wai Pong-yu received his BFA from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2006. Since then, he has developed a unique visual language of ballpoint-pen on paper. Wai's work contemplates notions of the cosmos, time and nature, as well as the complexities and conflicts inherent in human existence.

Recent group exhibitions include the Kathmandu Triennale 2077 (2022), Macao Museum of Art (2022), Para Site, Hong Kong (2020), and Guangdong Museum of Art (2020). Wai's work is in the collections of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, M+ and Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum. He was an artist-in-residence at K11 Art Village in Wuhan, in 2023. Wai lives and works in Hong Kong.



Wai Pong-yu  
A Rhythm of Landscape 54, 2022  
Ink on Paper  
51.5 x 34 cm

# Kelly Wang

b. 1992, New York / based in New York



Kelly Wang grew up in a family with a history of collecting and connoisseurship of Chinese art. She received her BA in Art History from CUNY Hunter College in 2014, and her MA also in Art History from Columbia University in 2016. She has studied traditional Chinese painting under the tutelage of Chen Ruikang, a student of Pu Ru's. An intercultural and multidisciplinary artist, Wang combines contemporary and historical materials to create multimedia works that explore themes of cultural identity and personal grief.

Wang has participated in solo and group exhibitions in the United States and Hong Kong. Her recent solo exhibition was held at Princeton University Art Museum, in 2022, after which the Museum acquired five of her paintings for their permanent collection. Wang lives and works in New York.



Kelly Wang, *Brush Rest 2*, 2023  
Mixed Media, 137 x 91 x 67 cm



Kelly Wang  
Microcosm 16, 2023  
Newspaper, *Xuan* Paper and Acrylic on Muslin  
Diameter: 101.6 cm



Kelly Wang  
Microcosm 17, 2023  
Newspaper, *Xuan* Paper and Acrylic on Muslin  
Diameter: 101.6 cm

# Wu Chi-Tsung

b. 1981, Taipei / based in Taipei



Wu Chi-Tsung received his BFA from the Taipei National University of the Arts in 2004. His multidisciplinary practice spans a broad range of media, including photography, video, installation, and painting. Integrating traditional aesthetics with technology and contemporary forms, his work challenges our perceptions of our physical and natural worlds.

Wu is the recipient of numerous awards, including most notably, the inaugural Liu Kuo-sung Ink Art Award in 2019. He has participated in solo and group exhibitions around the world. His work is in the collections of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, M+, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, among others. He was an-artist-in residence at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin in 2017, and at MoT+++ , Ho Chi Minh City in 2018. Wu lives and works in Taipei, with studios also in Berlin and Ho Chi Minh City.



Wu Chi-Tsung  
Wrinkled Texture 165, 2023  
Unique Cyanotype on *Xuan* Paper  
150 x 75 cm



# Zheng Chongbin

b. 1961, Shanghai / based in San Francisco



Zheng Chongbin graduated from the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now China Academy of Art) in Hangzhou where he specialised in traditional figure painting. In 1989, he received a fellowship from the San Francisco Art Institute to study installation, performance and conceptual art, earning his MFA in 1991. After completing his graduate studies, Zheng settled in the San Francisco Bay Area where he has been based since.

Zheng's distinctive body of work reflects his bicultural education and sensibility. Throughout his career of over three decades, he has held the ink painting tradition and Western abstraction in mutual tension. While his art draws from Western artistic principles, at its core is the notion held by the pre-modern Chinese that the world is made up of processes in flux. His practice encompasses ink and acrylic abstract paintings on paper, site-specific installation, video and more recently, monotype printmaking.

Zheng has exhibited internationally and his work is in the collections of M+, Hong Kong Museum of Art, MK Lau Collection, Hong Kong, the Marina Bay Sands, Singapore, British Museum, DSL Collection, Paris, Daimler Art Collection, Germany, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Orange County Museum of Art, among others.



Zheng Chongbin

Dawn, 2023

Oil-based Ink Monotype on BFK Rives Paper

104.5 x 74 cm



Zheng Chongbin  
Displaced Squares, 2023  
Oil-based Ink Monotype on BFK Rives Paper  
104.5 x 74 cm



Zheng Chongbin

Red Hills, 2023

Oil-based Ink Monotype on BFK Rives Paper

104.5 x 74 cm

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